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# Kate Hanson Professor of Community Leadership, travels to Thailand

Kate Hanson

*University of New Hampshire - Main Campus*

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## Kate Hanson

### Professor of Community Leadership -- Thailand

*Professor Hanson travelled to Thailand to visit non-governmental organizations and to explore possibilities for partnerships with her program/UNH students.*

As a professor of community leadership, I am interested in social justice, collective action, and the organizational structures that make fundamental change possible. Throughout my career, I have focused on these efforts within the United States. Recently, I've wanted to learn more about how other countries approach this work as well as how to better integrate a more global perspective into my teaching.

An invitation to visit from good friends who live in Bangkok and support from a UNH Faculty International Development Grant made a trip to Thailand possible. I arrived there in January 2013 with the goal of visiting as many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as I could. I wanted to educate myself about the types of NGOs that operate in Thailand, the kinds of work they do, how their organizational structures and management practices compare with those in our country, and how different community leaders and groups conceptualize social change. I also wanted to see if there were any possibilities for partnerships between my program/UNH students and organizations in Thailand.



View from Lisu Hill Tribe Village in Northern Thailand where many organizations work with villagers to improve economic and educational opportunities



Kate Hanson hesitantly feeding an elephant during her day volunteering at the Elephant Nature Park, an elephant rescue and rehabilitation center in Northern Thailand

The trip provided many opportunities for this research. I met with a program director of UNICEF; the founding directors of three NGOs; participated for a day as a volunteer at an elephant rescue organization to study how their work evolved and how they effectively involve dozens of volunteers daily (<http://www.elephantnaturepark.org>); spent three days at an eco-lodge that involves volunteers from around the world to help create a sustainable organization to meet needs of local children with special needs (<http://tcd-ecologic.jimdo.com/>); and visited a number of other nonprofits to see how they presented their work to the public and to understand some of their fundraising approaches. I also spent three days touring mountain villages in northern Thailand and studying how eco-tourism, and a foundation created by for-profit businesses, is supporting development in these remote areas. (<http://www.asian-oasis.com/working-communities>).

One of the most important connections for me was a meeting with Michael Shafer at Warm Heart (<http://warmheartworldwide.org/>), an NGO that he and his wife co-founded with Thai partners in

Phrao, a small village in northern Thailand. Michael is a New Hampshire native who left his professorship at Rutgers to start a nonprofit dedicated to empowering rural Thai villagers by providing access to improved education, basic services, jobs and sustainable income. Since the organization's inception in 2008, the founders, along with volunteers from around the world, have created dormitory space for forty hill tribe children and their guardians, organized community microenterprise training and opportunities, and worked with local officials to advocate for public policy initiatives. I left there with many ideas for ongoing partnerships and with a profound appreciation for their goals as well as for their approach to community and economic change.

In Bangkok, I met with Jeannette Gurung, referred to me by UNH employee Holly Harris, who founded and runs Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (<http://www.wocan.org/>), an international organization that is committed to building women's leadership through organizational and individual transformation. I am hoping to form a connection with this organization and two of my courses: Managing Change and Conflict in Communities and my new Feminist Leadership class. I also visited Cabbages and Condoms, a restaurant created to promote better understanding and acceptance of family planning and to generate income to support various development activities of the Population and Community Development Association (<http://www.cabbagesandcondoms.com>). I learned a great deal about their unique, humorous and remarkably successful approach to fundraising and providing affordable contraceptives to poor areas of Thailand.

I arrived home in mid-February with amazing memories, wonderful new contacts and friends, and a commitment to further research through partnerships and student involvement with several of these organizations.



Volunteers from around the world visit the Thai Child Development Foundation in the southern village of Paksong to help tutor village children, work in the gardens, and help raise funds for their outreach to children with special needs





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